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MARSHAL GROUCHY'S OWN ACCOUNT OF THE BATTLE OF WATERLOO

GROUCHY

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Grouchy, E[illegible], marquis de

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CONCERNING THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE LOSS OF THE BATTLE OF WATERLOO

The following is an explanatory excerpt from a letter to Mr. Bixby from the dealer through whom Marschal Grouchy's MS. account of the Battle of Waterloo was obtained:

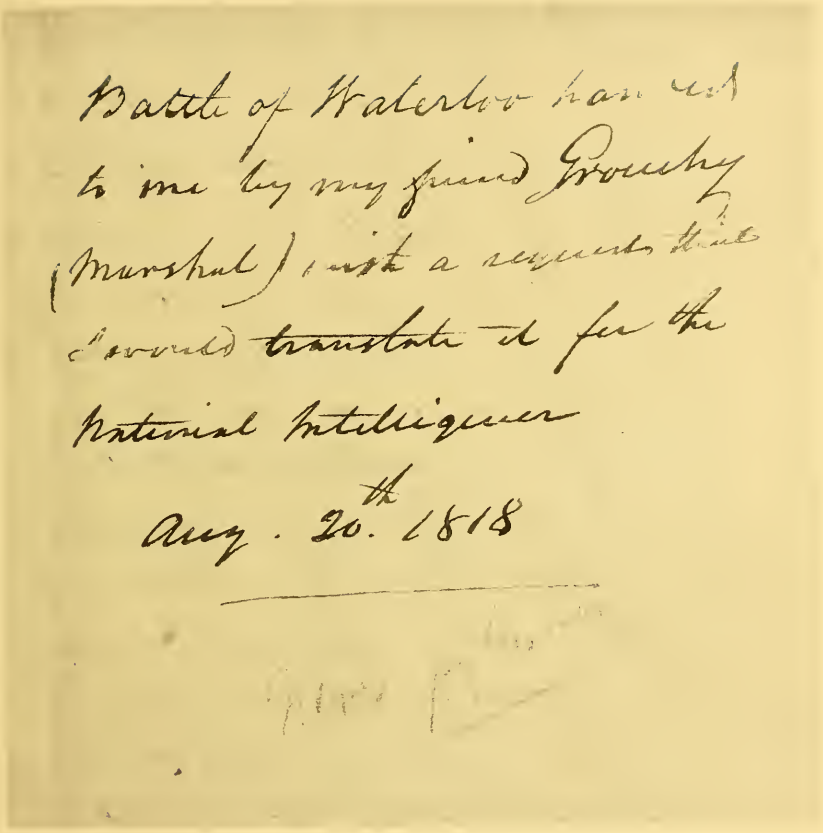
"When I purchased the manuscript now in your possession I was assured that it was an article written by Grouchy, sent to a magazine editor, but for some reason never published. My research of yesterday leads me to believe that, instead of being an unpublished article, it is the *original manuscript of the very account* on which centers the entire literature concerning who lost the Battle of Waterloo. . . The manuscript would thus prove to be far more valuable than I had at first supposed, as the central document in an historical controversy extending over half a century concerning the greatest historical event of that century."

ACCOUNT OF THE BATTLE OF WATERLOO

By Marshal Grouchy

A CORNER OF THE CURTAIN COVERING THE CAUSES FOR THE LOSS OF THE BATTLE OF WATERLOO LIFTED — THE IMPOSSIBILITY ON ACCOUNT OF ITS POSITION FOR THE ARMY CORPS UNDER THE ORDERS OF MARSHAL GROUCHY TO TAKE PART IN THIS BATTLE

The four days' campaign which ended the military career of Napoleon opened on the 15th day of June, 1815. The French army, 110,000 men strong, crossed the Sambre at Charleroy and engaged with a body of 20,000 Prussians which had taken position behind that city in order to retard the Emperor's advance. Some troops of the enemy which occupied Charleroy having retired toward Bruxelles by Quatra Bras, Marshal Ney was despatched by this route with 40,000 men. Im-


Battle of Waterloo has sent
to me by my friend Grouchy
(Marshal) I wish a request that
I would ~~translate~~ it for the
National Intelligencer
Aug. 20th 1818

THE ABOVE INDORSEMENT APPEARS ON THE BACK OF THE GROUCHY MS.

mediately after the passage of the Sambre, the Emperor having with him Marshal Grouchy and the rest of the army, making 70,000 men, moved toward Fleurus, and on the 16th of June attacked the main Prussian army, which he had hoped to surprise while encamped, but which he found drawn up in the plains behind that city. Although judged to be about 100,000 strong, it was defeated after offering a stubborn resistance. Toward ten o'clock in the evening Marshal Blucher, profiting by the obscurity of the night, effected his retreat, presumably in the direction of Namur and Wavre where, as was afterwards learned, lay the army of General Bülow, who was not able to arrive in time to take part in the battle of the 16th. (I say presumably, for cannons and prisoners were taken on both of these routes.)

Up to half-past twelve at noon on the 17th of June the Emperor — who until then had ordered no movement of the army — was waiting a report from Marshal Ney; as soon as he received it, he ordered Marshal Grouchy to take his place at the head of the corps of infantry under Generals Vendame and Gerard, and of the cavalry under Generals Pajol and

Excelmans, forming a total of some thirty thousand men, and to follow the Prussian army; this in spite of the fact that he had been informed that it had fifteen hours' start of the army sent to pursue it, having effected its retreat the evening before at ten o'clock, and the few light cavalry troops which had followed it had not been able to retard its movement.

Napoleon, marching to the left with his guard and the other troops that had fought at Fleurus, went to join Marshal Ney, who on the 16th had defeated the advance guard of the Duke of Wellington near Quatra Bras. He then found himself facing the entire English and Belgian army. Marshal Ney on the 16th would have destroyed the advance guard which he had been fighting, if, at the moment when the engagement was at its height, he had not been deprived of the regiments of the Count d'Erlon, nearly 20,000 strong. These troops spent the day in lazily covering the distance between Fleurus and Quatra Bras; they did not fire a single gun, and were of no use to the army fighting at Fleurus, where they did not even arrive!

The only orders given by the Emperor to

Marshal Grouchy after he was sent off on the 17th, and the day of the battle of Waterloo on the 18th, are those enclosed in a letter of the Marshal, Duke of Dalmatie (Major-general Soult), written on the field of the battle of Waterloo the 18th at one o'clock in the afternoon and delivered at four o'clock to Marshal Grouchy, then fighting with the Prussians, whose rear guard he had captured at eleven o'clock in the morning, one league from Wavre. After having been overthrown it was rallied in that city by the army of Marshal Blucher, who, since the evening before had taken its position on the heights behind the Dyle. Toward one o'clock Marshal Grouchy ordered General Vendame to take by main force the bridge over the Dyle. This attack not succeeding, he directed General Gerard and the cavalry of General Pajol to take the mill of Bielge and the village of Limellette, in order to effect there the passage of the river, while General Vendame kept up the combat in Wavre, and while a false attack was being carried on at the expense of that city.

Such was the state of affairs on the arrival of the officers bringing the dispatch from the

Duke of Dalmatie, the tenor of which is here given:

The 18th, one o'clock, P. M.

To Marshal Grouchy:

Monsieur le Maréchale, you wrote this morning at six o'clock to the Emperor that you would march upon Sarra Valain; then your project was to go to Corbaix and to Wavre. This movement is in accordance with his Majesty's orders, which were communicated to you. The Emperor, however, commanded me to tell you that you must keep maneuvring in our direction. It is your duty to see how we stand, in order to act accordingly and to join forces with us, so that you may always be ready to engage and crush whatever troops of the enemy may attempt to disturb our right wing.

At this moment the battle on the Waterloo side is already won; the enemy's center is at Mont St. Jean; so do your best to join our right. (Signed) LE DUC DE DALMATIE.

P. S. A letter which has just been intercepted brings the news that General Bülow is to attack our right flank. We think we see

his regiment on the heights of St. Lambert; so do not therefore lose an instant in coming and joining us and in crushing Bülow, whom you will take *in flagrante delictu.*

(Signed) LE MARSHAL DUC DE DALMATIE.

As the Prussians were masters of the most practicable communication between Wavre and Waterloo, and as there was no direct route between Waterloo and the position near Wavre, where the troops under Marshal Grouchy's orders were fighting, they were obliged, in order to join the Emperor, to travel over nearly five leagues and to cross a difficult wooded country, cut by ravines.

The orders to join forces were sent at one o'clock, P. M., and did not arrive until four o'clock. Marshal Grouchy's troops, which had to force the passage of the river, were then fighting with an enemy superior in numbers and occupying a strong position, which it was necessary to capture. It was then physically impossible for them to arrive at Waterloo in time to change the fortune of the day, which was decided — as all those instructed in military affairs well knew — at the moment when

General Bülow's troops appeared on the flank of the French army: in other words, at the moment when Napoleon summoned Marshal Grouchy to him.

In examining with some attention the letter of Marshal Duc de Dalmatie, one is convinced, —

1st. That Marshal Grouchy operated according to the Emperor's intentions in marching upon Wavre.

2nd. That Napoleon did not think of summoning this Marshal until one o'clock in the afternoon, at the very instant when the head of General Bülow's column showed itself on the Heights of St. Lambert, and consequently when it was much too late to paralyze the flank attack of the Prussians.

Finally, it is well to remember what English pride and Prussian boasting have taken great care to minimize — I mean the numerical superiority of the allies. It was so great that in spite of Marshal Blucher's losses at Fleurus, his army, united since the 17th with Bülow's troops at Wavre, was triple the force under Marshal Grouchy's command sent to pursue him. The pursuit could not give great

results, because it was not ordered until fifteen hours after Blucher's retreat. He had the time to rally his army, to place it advantageously, and he did not expose himself or make a great display of genius in directing half of his army on Napoleon's flank, while with the other half he would retard for some time the march of Marshal Grouchy; would dispute with him the passage of the Dyle and (on account of the forces which he left before him and of their position) would have even chances of crushing his contingent.

Only a blind and even culpable partiality (for such it is when an attempt is made to obscure the historic truth and to betray the sound opinion, which evidence of facts, experience of war, and military methods have necessarily inculcated) could possibly claim, as did the judicious author of the "Considérations sur l'Art de la Guerre," that Marshal Grouchy's troops remained on the 18th in stupid immobility and that on hearing the cannon on his left he ought to have disregarded the instructions which had been given him, to have abandoned the pursuit of Marshal Blucher, and to have gone to join Napoleon.

The writers of articles inserted in the different papers are equally mistaken when they declare that Marshal Grouchy was deluded by Marshal Blucher; that he took the troops left before him for the main Prussian army and that if he had followed a parallel march, contrary to his orders, which were to pursue Marshal Blucher and to complete his defeat by attacking him wherever he happened to fall in with him, it would have saved Napoleon.

Without doubt this assertion would have been justified, if on the evening of the 17th Napoleon had sent to Marshal Grouchy orders to join forces with him. Or even if on the 18th at daybreak these orders had come, then they might have been carried out, at a profitable time, and probably the fate of the battle and the issue of the campaign would have been different; but in truth, given as they were, on the 18th at one o'clock in the afternoon to troops who could not receive them until many hours after, who had the passage of a river to effect, and nearly five hours of marching in order to get there, and given only when the head of the Prussian column was in sight, it became illusive; for it was obviously impos-

retraite dès la veille, a Dix heures du Soir, et le peu de Cavalerie légère qui l'avoit
suivie, n'ayant pas été dans le Cas de retarder Son Mouvement.)

Napoléon marchant hors
L'arrivée de l'officier porteur de la dépêche du Duc de Dalmatie dont voici la teneur :

Au Mal Prouchy -

Ce 18. a une heure après Midi

« Monsieur le Maréchal, vous avez écrit ce Matin a Six heures à l'Empereur
que vous Marcheriez Sur Sarrayalain : donc votre projet étoit de vous porter à

retraite dès la veille, a Dix heures du soir, et le peu de Cavalerie légère qui l'avoit suivie, n'ayant pas été dans le Cas de retarder son Mouvement).

Napoléon marchant par sa gauche avec sa garde, et les autres troupes qui avoient Combattu à Fleurus, alla joindre le Maréchal Ney, qui le 16 avoit défait l'avant garde du Duc de Wellington près des quatre bras, et qui se trouvoit alors, en présence de toute l'armée anglaise, et Belge. (le Maréchal Ney eut annéanti le 16, l'avant garde qu'il avoit Combattu, Si au moment de l'engagement étoit le plus vif, on ne lui eut retiré le Corps du Comte D'Erlon, fort depuis de vingt mil hommes, qui passa la Journée en promenades oiseuses entre Fleurus et les quatre bras, ne brula pas une amorce et ne fut d'aucun utilité à l'armée qui se battoit à fleurus, ou il arriva même point).

Les seuls ordres donnés par l'empereur au Maréchal Grouchy depuis qu'il l'eut détaché le 17. Et le Jour de la bataille de Waterloo le 18. Sont ceux renfermés dans une lettre du Maréchal Duc de Dalmatie (Soult) major général, écrite du Champ de bataille de Waterloo, le 18 à une heure après midi, et remise a quatre heures du Soir au Maréchal Grouchy, alors aux prises avec les prussiens, dont il avoit obtenu [illegible] de Wavre, à onze heures, a une lieue de Wavre. après avoir été culbutés, elle s'étoit ralliée dans cette ville à l'armée du Maréchal Blucher, qui de la veille y avoit pris position sur les hauteurs en arrière de la Dyle, qui la partage, vers les une heure le Maréchal Grouchy avoit chargé le général Vendamme d'enlever de vive force le pont sur la Dyle, son attaque ne réussissant pas il avoit dirigé le général Gerard et la Cavalerie du général Pajol, sur le moulin de Bielge et le village de limelette, pour y effectuer le passage de la rivière, tandis que le général Vendamme entretenoit le Combat dans Wavre, et qu'une fausse attaque s'executoit au dessous de cette ville.

Tel étoit l'état des Choses, lors de l'arrivée de l'officier porteur de la dépêche du Duc de Dalmatie dont voici la teneur:

Au Mal Grouchy - Ce 18. a une heure après Midi

« Monsieur le Maréchal, vous avez écrit ce Matin a six heures à l'Empereur que vous Marcheriez Sur Sarravalien: donc votre projet étoit de vous porter à

sible that the coöperation of Marshal Grouchy could have taken place, and that he prevented the honors of the victory from falling into the hands of the French army, which did not cease to reap a harvest of them at the field of Waterloo, until the moment of the flank attack of the Prussians.

N. B. The original of the orders of the Marshal Duke of Dalmatie and all the official documents relating to this campaign are in the hands of a public officer at Paris and will be published some day. Not being supported by substantial evidence the history of this campaign and of the causes of this disaster would be only a sort of declaration bearing the colors of the party to which its writer now belongs.

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